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ABSTRACT

Undertaken in April and May of 1974, this study utilized a two-page, 52-item questionnaire which was mailed to 300 high school journalism teachers in the state of California. The teachers were selected by random sampling and represent 78 percent of the estimated 382 who teach at schools with enrollments of 1000 or more. One hundred seventy-six questionnaires were returned and 158 (52.6 percent) were usable for tabulation purposes. The hypotheses that high school journalism teachers lack professional and academic journalistic experience and that they desire help in improving their qualifications were borne out by the results of the study. Recommendations for improving teacher preparation in California are discussed and several solutions are suggested. (RB)

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A Study of the Educational and Professional Backgrounds of Journalism Teachers in California Public High Schools with Enrollments of One Thousand or More

by

David Clement Henley, Ph.D.

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A paper presented to the Secondary School Division of the Association for Education in Journalism national convention August 18-21, 1974, San Diego State University, California.

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This study has been read and endorsed by Jack Nelson, investigative reporter in the Los Angeles Times Washington Bureau who edited Captive Voices, The Report of the Commission of Inquiry Into High School Journalism. Captive Voices was sponsored and convened by the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial.

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Los Angeles Times
WASHINGTON BUREAU

August 2, 1974

FOREWARD

High school journalism needs all the help it can get. That's why the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial convened the Commission of Inquiry into High School Journalism. And that's why I undertook the task of compiling and writing the Commission's report, published in book form under the title, "Captive Voices."

That's also why I'm taking a few moments away from writing about impeachment for the Los Angeles Times to write a brief foreward to David Clement Henley's Study of the Educational Backgrounds of Journalism Teachers in California Public High Schools.

Henley's findings on a state basis closely parallel the national findings of the Commission of Inquiry. In essence, he and the commission found that the quality of high school journalism is low and that journalism instructors generally have little or no special education or professional experience to qualify them for their roles.

Surveys, as reported in "Captive Voices," indicate that "a majority of teachers and advisers not only have little or no journalism background, but have relatively little interest in taking their jobs in the first place. Less than half the teachers surveyed by the Commission had either more than twelve hours of college preparation or experience in journalism. Only 32 per cent of them had requested their assighments."

Henley, with a background as a professional journalism as well as a college journalism instructor, has compiled a study that shows in even more detail the shortcomings of high school journalism education in California.

Despite the increased importance of communications in today's complex world, high school journalism continues to be badly neglected not only by my own field of professional journalism, but by Henley's field of education. I hope his findings will be taken seriously by my field as well as his.

Jack Nelson
Washington Bureau
Los Angeles Times

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Perhaps at no other time in this nation's history have the profession of journalism and the role of mass media in American society been so widely discussed and debated.

Some Americans believe the American media is at fault for many of the country's ills and that the press is greatly biased against the current leadership and traditional American political processes. Others feel the press is directly responsible for the exposure of alleged shortcomings in the nation's foreign and domestic policies and the present national administration.

Regardless of how one feels towards the quality and effectiveness of the mass media in the United States, it is a fact that the study of journalism in more popular today than at any time since the formal introduction of high school journalism courses began in the early 1900's. Journalism at the college and university level is also growing each year.

Although studies of high school journalism teachers in California vis-a-vis their educational and professional qualifications are non-existent, surveys taken of faculty in several other states show that the majority of these teachers have little or no professional journalism experience and little or no academic journalism background.

Authorities on high school journalism education, such as the Secondary School Division of the Association for Education in Journalism, the Journalism Education Association, various state press associations such as the California Newspaper

Publishers Association, Quill and Scroll, the Newspaper Fund, and, most recently, the Captive Voices report of the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial inquiry into high school journalism, have stated that the high school journalism teacher must be adequately prepared both professional and academically to teach journalism.

Although it is recognized that other factors may impede instruction of journalism at the secondary school level -- such as censorship, lack of funds and equipment, and lack of administrative support and interest -- most observers of high school journalism feel that the teachers' backgrounds are the single most important factor.

The writer came to the conclusion that an investigation into the backgrounds of California high school journalism teachers would be appropriate now because the State Department of Education currently is preparing new credential requirements for subjects taught in the state's high schools. Up-to-date information on the status of journalism will be presented at the time this paper is discussed at the San Diego A.E.J. meeting.

This study was undertaken in April and May of 1974. It utilized a two-page, 52-item questionnaire which was mailed to 300 high school journalism teachers in the state. They were selected by random sampling. They represented 78 per cent of the estimated 382 who teach at schools with enrollments of 1000 or more. Schools this size were chosen because many smaller schools offer no formal journalism instruction. A total of 176 questionnaires were returned to the writer, and 158 of these, or 52.6 per cent of the total, were deemed usable for tabulation purposes.

Following are conclusions based on the findings.

1. Only 34 of the 158 teachers (or 21 percent) were journalism majors as undergraduates.

2. Only 15 of the 158 teachers (or 9.4 percent) were journalism minors.

3. More than one-third of the 158 had received no journalism training whatsoever as an undergraduate, and nearly a third received minimal undergraduate training.

4. Of the 88 teachers who have master's degrees, only 9 have these in journalism. These 9 represent .57 percent of the total 158 and 10 percent of the 88 figure.

5. Only 19 percent of the 158 had taken any journalism whatsoever in their graduate work.

6. Approximately 25 percent reported they had no professional journalism experience at all.

7. Of those who reported some journalism experience, only 25 percent had experience which could be considered professional. The rest stated their journalism experience was gained solely at the high school and collegiate and university level.

8. The overwhelming majority of the 158 respondents stated it was their personal opinion that high school journalism teachers in California should have a minimum of a journalism minor and/or meaningful journalism experience. It should be noted here that this journalism minor and/or journalism experience was

the minimum they listed. Many said the teachers should have majors in journalism, master's degrees in journalism, and significant journalism experience.

9. Most of the teachers said they recognized their lack of journalistic educational and professional experience.

10. These teachers said they desire greater education and training in basic journalistic subjects, such as beginning newswriting, layout and editing, photography, journalism law, history, radio and television news, and coursework in the mass media.

Recommendations

The findings of this study indicate that journalism teachers in California's public high schools lack the minimum qualification for teaching the subject. The literature indicates that other factors may impede instruction of journalism at the secondary level. If undue censorship is imposed by administrators on journalism teachers and their students, or there is a lack of administrative support and interest for journalism courses at the high school level, and if funding and adequate equipment are not available, the programs will suffer. These aspects, however, have not been a subject for study in this work.

It is this writer's opinion that the single most important contributor to the journalism programs

are the teachers themselves.

The following recommendations are made as a result of this study and the review of the literature.

1. The California certification requirements for teaching journalism at the secondary school level should include a major or minor in journalism.

2. Those desiring to teach journalism who do not possess a journalism major or minor may be exempted from this requirement if they (a) can prove significant professional journalism experience, or (b) can pass a written and oral examination of the type which could be given a journalism major or minor at the undergraduate level, or (c) have a master's degree in journalism. The requirements for a and b would be determined and administered by a commission of journalists appointed by the California Commission on Teacher Licensing.

3. Statewide journalistic groups, such as the California Newspaper Publishers Association and local press clubs, and nationwide journalistic groups, such as the Association for Education in Journalism, Sigma Delta Chi, and Theta Sigma Phi, should take an active interest in high school journalism education. Utilizing their community leadership roles and their traditional "power of the press," these groups should meet with the State Department of Education, legislative education committees, local school boards and superintendants and journalism teachers themselves in an effort to upgrade

scholastic journalism education.

4. California collegiate and university journalism educators should offer more, cheaper, and easily accessible courses in journalism for high school journalism teachers. Scholarships and living expenses for these teachers who take advantage of the courses should be partially borne by local press clubs, journalistic groups and school districts.

5. School administrators and principals should refuse to hire teachers who do not meet minimum qualifications for teaching journalism.

6. Teachers not possessing these minimum qualifications should be encouraged to upgrade their professional and academic expertise.

7. Teachers refusing to upgrade their professional and academic journalistic expertise should not be advanced on salary schedules.

8. Journalism teaching should be a full-time position for at least one teacher at all public high schools of 1,000 or more enrollment. Advising the school publications, helping "put out" the school publications at the print shop, and other ancillary duties related to journalism should be considered by administrators as "teaching" just as if the teachers were carrying out these responsibilities in the traditional one-hour classroom setting.

Distribution of 158 California High School Journalism Teachers and Their Undergraduate Majors

Undergraduate Major	Number of Teachers
English	65
Journalism	34
History	10
Literature	5
Education	4
Language arts	4
Political science	4
Business administration	3
Physical education	3
Business education	2
French	2
Geography	2
Philosophy	2
Speech	2
Speech-communication	2
Advertising	1
American studies	1
Anthropology	1
Art	1
Creative writing	1
Drama	1
Economics	1
English-Italian	1
Home economics	1
Humanities	1
Liberal arts	1
Psychology	1
Religion	1
Social sciences	1

Distribution of 158 California High School Journalism Teachers and Their Undergraduate Minors

Undergraduate Minor	Number of Teachers
English	39
History	25
None	14
Journalism	15
Social sciences	8
Education	7
Social studies	7
Art	3
French	3
Physical education	3
Political science	3
Economics	2
German	2
Language arts	2
Philosophy	2
Russian	2
Science	2
Sociology	2
Spanish	2
Speech	2
Art history	1
Behavioral sciences	1
Business administration	1
Chemistry	1
Criminology	1
English-journalism	1
French-history	1
Geography	1
Health	1
Home economics	1
Music	1
Philosophy-religion	1
Psychology	1

Distribution of 88 of the 158 California High School Journalism Teachers Who Have Master's Degrees

Subject of Master's Degree	Number of Teachers
Education	36
English	21
Journalism	9
Literature	6
History	5
American studies	1
Business education	1
Creative writing	1
Economics	1
Geography	1
Human behavior	1
Photography	1
Physical education	1
Semantics	1
Slavic languages	1
Theater arts	1